

حرية



FREEDOM

notes for a talk given by:

Shaykh A. Nooruddeen Durkee
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لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

lāā °ikrāha fi-d-dīn

there is no compulsion in religion
(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:256)



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Shaykh A. Nooruddeen Durkee
Green Mountain School
313sand313@gmail.com
Charlottesville, Virginia
GreenMountainSchool.Org

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا ؕ
أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ

wa law shāā°a rabbuka la°āmāna man f-il-arḍi kulluhum jamī°ā.
°afa°ānta tukrihu-n-nāsa ḥatta yakūnū mu°minīn

If it had been the will of your Lord
that all the people of the world should be believers,
all the people of the earth would have believed!
Would you then compel mankind against their will to believe?
(Sūrah Yunus 10:99)

وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً
وَلَكِنْ يَضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ؕ وَلِتُسْأَلُنَّ عَمَّا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

wa law shāā°a-l-lahu la-ja°alakum °ummātan wāḥidah.
wa lakin yuḍillu mañy-yashāā°u wa yahdī mañy-yashāā°.
wa la-tus°alunna °ammā kuñtum ta°malūn

If Allāh had willed He would have made you one community.
However, He misguides whom He wills and guides whom He wills.
You will be questioned about what you did.
(Sūratu-n-Naḥl 16:93)

مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِي ۖ وَمَنْ يُضِلِلْ

mañy-yahdi-l-lāhu fa-huwa-l-muhtadī wa mañy-yuḍālil

And if We had willed, We could have given every soul its guidance.
(Sūratu-l-°Arāāf 7:178)

وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَآتَيْنَا كُلَّ نَفْسٍ هُدَاهَا

wa-law shi°nā lāā°atayna kulla nafsīn hudāhā

Had We so willed We could have given guidance to everyone
(Sūratu-l-Sajda 32:13)

Zayd ibn Aslam ؓ heard from his father, “I heard °Umar bin al-Khaṭṭab ؓ say to an old Christian woman, ‘Become Muslim, old woman, become Muslim. Allāh ﷻ sent Muḥammad ﷺ with the Truth.’ She replied, ‘I am an old woman and close to death.’ ‘Umar said, ‘Oh Allāh, witness!’ and he recited the verse, ‘There is no compulsion in the religion (*ad-dīn/الدين*).’”

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

lāā °ikrāha fī-d-dīn
(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:256)

وَإِنْ مَا نُرِيَنَّكَ بَعْضَ الَّذِي نَعِدُهُمْ
أَوْ نتَّوَفَيْنَكَ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلَاغُ وَعَلَيْنَا الْحِسَابُ

wa-im-mā nuriyannaka ba°da-l-ladḥī na°iduhum aw
natawaffayannaka fa-°innama °alayka-l-balāghu wa-°alayna-l-ḥisāb
And if We show you (in your life) part of what we promised them
or take to ourselves your soul (before it is all accomplished),
your duty is to make (the Message) reach them:
it is our part to call them to account.

(Sūratu-r-Ra°ad 13:40)

فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ

fāā-°in tawallaw fāā-°innamā °alayka-l-balāghu-l-mubīn
But if they turn away

your only duty is to deliver the message clearly.

(Sūratu Nahl 16:82)

رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ ° إِنْ يَشَأْ يُزْهِمَكُمْ أَوْ إِنْ يَشَأْ يُعَذِّبْكُمْ °
وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَكِيلًا

rabbukum °a°lamu bi-kum °iñy-yashāā° yarḥamkum
aw°iñy-yashāā° yu°adhḥibkum
wa mā arsalnāka °alayhim wakīla

Your Lord knows you best.

If He wills, He will have mercy on you,
and, if He wills, He will punish you.

We did not send you to be their guardian.

(Sūrah Isrāā° 17:54)

مَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

māā °arsalnākāā °illā raḥmatal-li-l-°ālamīn

We have not sent you except as a Mercy for all the worlds.

(Sūratu-l-°Ambiyāā° 21:107)

الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ
الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ
يَأْمُرُهُمْ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ
وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ
وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ
فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ مَعَهُ
أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

alladhīna yattabi^oūna-r-rasūla-n-nabiyya-l-^oummiyya-l-
-ladhī yajidūnahu maktūban ^oiṇdahum fi-t-tawrāti wa-l-^oinjīl;
ya^omuruhum bi-l-ma^orūfi wa yanhāhum ^oani-l-munkar;
wa yuḥillu lahumu-t-ṭayyibātī
wa yuḥarrimu ^oalayhimu-l-khabāā^oith;
wa yaḍa^ou ^oañhum ^oiṣrahum wa-l^oaghḷālā-l-latī kānat ^oalayhim;
fa-l-ladhīna ^oāmanū bihi wa ^oazzarūhu wa naṣarūhu
wa ^oittaba^ou-n-nūra-l-ladhī ^ounzila ma^oah:
^oūlāā^oika humu-l-mufliḥūn

“Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet,
whom they find mentioned in their Torah and the Gospels;
he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil;

he allows them as lawful what is pure
and prohibits them from what is impure;

He releases them from their heavy burdens
and from the yokes that are upon them.

So it is those who believe in him, honor him, help him,
and follow the light which is sent down with him,
it is they who will prosper.”

(Sūratu-l-A^orāf 7:157)

Submission to the will and law of Allāh ﷻ is the origin of freedom. It liberates the mind, soul, and behaviour from the evil influences of the world and helps humans overcome oppressive tyrants, unjust laws, lusts, deviations and that which enslaves their will.

حرية — Freedom

Submission (ʿistislām/استسلام) to the will of Allāh ﷻ grants human beings the means to choose a better way of life and to live their lives in harmony with the laws of the universe (fiṭra/فطرة).

This form of submission to the Will and Prescriptions of Allāh ﷻ known in the present time as ʿIslām, was revealed to the final prophet of humanity, Muḥammad ﷺ, as it was to all those who came before him, notably Ibrāhīm, Mūsa, Dawūd and ʿĪsā ﷺ.

As such the message continued within ʿIslām freed human beings from the darkness of polytheism, paganism, slavery and injustice and opened the doors to moral and social reform, as well as creating an atmosphere of security and safety in which people were free to think, invent, and seek the road to perfection and salvation, hope and optimism which gave true meaning to their existence.

Oppression and servitude deprive us of our moral freedom and are prisons in which terror and tyranny devour our self image, will and desire to grow spiritually. Oppression and servitude deprive human life of all sense of a higher purpose and rob us of our free will and destroy all that is good in our nature.

Following the way of ʿIslām grants freedom, based on commitment and responsibility, without which there can be no true freedom. Freedom without restraints leads only to nihilism, the consequence of which is the complete breakdown of the moral and social order. The irresponsible concept of freedom expounded by the secular modern theories of freedom of expression lead only to corruption and immorality, since they are not firmly tied to any ultimate higher moral values or self control. ʿIslāmic freedom lies in commitment and responsibility. They form an integral part of each other and can in no way be separated. There is no freedom of choice without responsibility; no responsibility without freedom.

Because the way of ʿIslām insists that we have free will, since that is the way Allāh ﷻ created us, it allows us to fully express this freedom and to practise it, but within the limits of commitment, responsibility and self control mandated by the Creator ﷻ.

Each of us thus has an obligation to choose the path of righteousness, and to safeguard our own freedom and that of others.

Because free will is both granted and guaranteed within the Way of ʾIslām, it is expected that we will use the freedom we have been granted to further knowledge in all areas which help bring about the improvement of everyone on this earth. This is known technically as *maṣlaḥa* (مصلحة) which means, practically, that which is prohibited or permitted on the basis of whether or not it serves the public's benefit or welfare, derived from the root *ṣalaḥa*, which means that which is good, wholesome, sound and right. By it we are all urged to consider the physical and spiritual welfare of others in all of our endeavors. This prevents freedom from being turned into dictatorship which exploits and usurps the inalienable rights of the many for the benefit of the select few or a single individual.

Simple examples of this might include the understanding that an engineer can design a bomb or a bridge; a pharmacist can create a poison or a panacea; a teacher can teach us how to game the system for personal gain or how to put the system to work for the common good. The choice, in accord with the prescriptions of Allāh ﷻ contained in the Way of ʾIslām, must be based on this principle of *maṣlaḥa* which precludes that, in most cases, a bridge is more useful than a bomb, a panacea is better than poison and working for the common good is better than working to enrich only one's own self.

In the Qurʾān, Allāh ﷻ presents us with many lessons drawn from history. In it we find stories of nations and communities that destroyed themselves by ignoring the way of Allāh ﷻ and taking the way of temporal worldly gains and selfish desires. For example:

أَوَلَمْ يَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ
فَيَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ؕ
كَانُوا هُمْ أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَآثَارًا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَأَخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ
وَمَا كَانَ لَهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَاقٍ

ʾawa lam yasīrū fi-l-ʾarḍi
fa-yaṇḍhurū kayfa kāna ʾāqibatu-l-ladḥīna kānū miñ qabālihīm;
kānū hum ʾaṣḥadda minhum quwwatañw-
wa ʾathḥāran fi-l-ʾarḍi fa-ʾaḥḥadḥahumu-llāhu bi ḍhunūbihim
wa mā kāna lahum mīna-llāhi miñ wāqī

“Have they not travelled in the land
to see what happened to those who disbelieved before them?

They were mightier than these in power
and (in the) traces (of that which they) left behind them in the earth;
yet Allah seized them for their sins
and they had no protector from Allah”

(Sūratu-l-Ghāfir 40:21)

إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ

°idhā tutla °alayhi °āyātunā qāla °āsāṭīru-l-°awwalīn

When Our Signs are recited to him, he says, ‘tales of the ancients!’

(Sūratu-l-Mutaffifīn 83:13)

كَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ كَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْكُمْ قُوَّةً وَآكَثَرَ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا
فَاسْتَمْتَعُوا بِخَلَاقِهِمْ فَاسْتَمْتَعْتُمْ بِخَلَاقِكُمْ كَمَا اسْتَمْتَعَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ
قَبْلِكُمْ بِخَلَاقِهِمْ وَخُضْتُمْ كَالَّذِي خَاضُوا ؕ أُولَٰئِكَ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ
فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ؕ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ • أَلَمْ يَأْتِهِمْ نَبَأُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ
قَبْلِهِمْ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ وَقَوْمِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَأَصْحَابِ مَدْيَنَ
وَالْمُؤْتَفِكَاتِ ؕ أَتَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ؕ فَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ
وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

ka-l-ladhīna miñ qabālikum kānū °ashadda minkum quwwatañw-

wa °aktḥara °āmwālāñw-wa °āwlādan

fa °istamta°ū bi-kḥalāqihim fa-s-tamta°tum bi-kḥalāqikum

kamā-°s-tamta°a-l-ladhīna min qabālikum bi-kḥalāqihim

wa kḥuḍtum ka-l-ladhī kḥādū :

°ulāā°ika ḥabīṭat °a°māluhum fi-d-dunyā wa-l-°akḥīrah ;

wa °ulāā°ika humu-l-kḥāsīrūn •

°alam ya°tihim naba°ū-l-ladhīna min qabālihīm

qawmi nūḥiñw-wa °ādīñw-wa ṭḥamūda wa qawmi °ibārāhīma

wa °aṣḥābi madyana wa -l-mu°tafikāt ;

°atatuhum rusuluhum bi-l-bayyināt ;

famā kāna- llāhu li-yaḍḥlimahum

wa lakin kānū °anfusahum yaḍḥlimūn

حرية — Freedom

“Like those before them, they were more powerful than you,
and with more wealth and offspring [and] they enjoyed their lives.
And you enjoy your lives as those before you enjoyed their lives;
and you joke as they joked.

They had their work crumble in this world and the next,
and they were the losers.

Didn't the news of those who came before them
reach the people of Nuḥ and 'Ād and Ṭhamūd,
and the people of 'Ibrāhīm and the inhabitants of Madyan
and the drowned cities?

Their Messengers brought them the Clear Signs.
Allāh did not wrong them; rather they wronged themselves.
(Sūratu-t-Ṭawba 9:69-70)



The emphasis on materialism and freedom without responsibilities in modern societies is destroying the social and moral fabric of those societies. It gives rise to moral decadence, promiscuity, crime and a lack of respect for all moral, legal and natural courses of action.

Freedom is abused and has become a subversive tool, a scourge to mankind. This abuse of freedom has resulted in chaos the world over. It has led to corruption, crime, militarism, war, poverty, drug addiction; and freedom is just a word for nothing left to lose.

National and international organizations agree in their surveys that drug addiction throughout the industrialized world is increasing at an alarming rate. More than 50 million people worldwide are thought to be addicted to drugs. It is estimated that among the poor, mainly black, ghettos of North American cities the addiction rate is 50%. On some Amer-indian reservations alcoholism can run as high as 80% of the population. This increase is taking place in spite of massive public awareness campaigns and millions of dollars spent on education, not to mention what is spent on the so-called “War on Drugs”. Thousands of people are jailed throughout the world every day for drug related crime. But the true causes of drug addiction – the breakdown of moral values, the helplessness and despair of the underprivileged, and the emphasis of a secular society on instant self gratification and solution of problems – are never addressed.

Across the population at large surveys suggest that 20% of the people are addicted either to drugs or alcohol. Rates are highest amongst the young. Millions of dollars, that could be spent on bettering the lives of the poor and underprivileged, are wasted on the war against drugs and drug pushers.

In the 1980s, with the introduction of crack cocaine into the USA, the crime rate due to drug addiction increased dramatically. It is estimated that at least 60% of young Americans have experimented with one type of drug or another and there is no reason to expect that the figures are any lower in other industrialized countries.

In the Soviet Union alcoholics are now estimated to number about 40 million. These numbers are having an adverse effect on the country's industrialization and production figures.

The Paris based *Jeune Afrique* magazine reported that 60% of traffic accidents and 40% of divorce cases are as a result of alcoholism. In 1986, in Japan, 25,524 people committed suicide and the numbers have increased in every following year as materialism takes its toll on the Japanese population.

In Britain one out of every five children suffers from the consequence of family breakdown. Drug addiction and related crime are reaching unprecedented rates and bringing appalling suffering to the people.

Additionally human life is gravely threatened by the collapse of the natural male-female relationship, free sex, debauchery and lack of self control. Dangerous and often fatal diseases are the natural consequence of unlicensed sexual practices.

Throughout the world it is estimated that between 5 and 10 million people carry the AIDS virus. It is expected that at the close of this century there will be over 100 million infected people who, because of the laxity of moral standards, will continue to infect others.

AIDS is an epidemic disease. It destroys the body's immune system and leads to an appalling death. So far no cure has been discovered for it although it is well known that sexual abstinence can prevent it. Except in the rare circumstances where AIDS is contacted through infected blood transfusion and medical contact, AIDS is a result of illegal drug use through infected intravenous needles or through

illicit homosexual and heterosexual relationships. It is spreading rapidly throughout the world, and it is reckoned that the number of AIDS victims doubles every eight months.

The *Sunday Times* of London has reported that Britain may lose 10,000 citizens to AIDS before the end of the century. In the USA the number of AIDS victims continues to rise at alarming rates. More children are born with the disease and suffer dreadfully throughout their short lives. Educational authorities, hoping to stem the increase of victims, emphasize 'self-sex' or masturbation rather than considering or taking into account the moral license that leads to the disease in most cases. It appears that the authorities believe that moral values have no role to play in the correction of the disease.

The drug problem is also intimately connected to the rampant militarism that is increasingly infecting and affecting the third world.

The arms industry is a global industry and business which manufactures and sells weapons and military technology and equipment. It comprises government and commercial industry involved in research, development, production, and service of military material, equipment and facilities. Arms producing companies, also referred to as *defense* [sic] companies or the arms industry, produce weapons mainly for the armed forces of states. Departments of government also operate in the arms industry, buying and selling weapons, munitions and other military items. Products include guns, ammunition, missiles, military aircraft, military vehicles, ships, electronic systems, and more. The arms industry also conducts significant research and development and corrupts every higher educational institution with its ill-spent wealth.

It is estimated that yearly, over 1.5 trillion dollars are spent on military expenditures worldwide, almost 50% of which is spent by the United States. Part of this goes to the procurement of military hardware and services from the military industry. The combined arms sales of the top 100 largest arms producing companies amounted to an estimated \$315 billion in 2006. In 2004 over \$30 billion were spent in the international arms trade (a figure that excludes domestic sales of arms) and an illegal trade in small arms is prevalent in many regions affected by political instability.

This latter statistic meshes with the use of child slavery and rape as instruments of warfare, which is further fueled by and fuels the drug and AIDS epidemic, not to mention the wide spread food deficiency and outright starvation that accompanies so many “bush wars”.

These statistics and reports draw a grim picture of the consequences of the materialistic life which has turned its back on Allāh ﷻ, the message of the Prophet ﷺ and all the moral and spiritual values of contained in the teachings of the Qurʾān and the manifest example of the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.

The terrible suffering brought about by these diseases and addictions are a result of the inability of people to practise freedom with restraint and responsibility. Across the world limitless so-called freedom has resulted in chaos, disorder, crime, despair and death and, for many, the annihilation of the very freedom they sought.

Young people the world over are attracted by the outward manifestation of the freedom in the industrialised countries. They do not understand the dangerous, destructive underside of the materialistic world. They look to these regions for ideas on clothing, eating and social conduct, forgetting that the price of such behaviour is a loss of moral values. Lured by the fashionable clothing and standards of behaviour, they absorb the bankrupt moral codes of the so-called global society which understands freedom as a license to act as one pleases unrestrained by any form of moral commitment or responsibilities, with the result that promiscuity rages, families collapse and a generation of children which is in need of love and care is becoming increasingly lost as a result of drinking, drug taking and street crime, which is destroying millions of young lives East and West, North and South.

Economic freedom under the rubric of globalisation is seen as a means to exploit the underprivileged by bribery and corruption. A capitalist class, whose sole aim is to amass wealth in the hands of a few, has grown powerful and influential on the sweat of others.

In the United States 400 individuals control more wealth than 168 million people, and according to economist Janet Yellen, “growth [in real income] is heavily concentrated at the very tip of the top, that is, the top 1 percent.”

A 2006 analysis of IRS income data by economists Emmanuel Saez at UC Berkeley and Thomas Piketty at the Paris School of Economics showed that the share of income held by the top 1% was as large in 2005 as it was in 1928. The data revealed that reported income increased by 9% in 2005, with the mean for the top 1% increasing by 14% and that for the bottom 90% dropping by 0.6%. And what is totally ironic is that it is this bottom percentile that routinely elects congressmen and senators who then vote to increase the tax benefits for this top 1% whilst at the same time increasing the burden on the poor by cutting social spending, with one result being that now the top 10% of the American population control 71% of the wealth, while in real constant dollars the actual increase in income by an average worker since 1960 is roughly \$1.50 per week.

The average debt of low and middle-class American families is \$9,827. Many of them depend on plastic (interest/*ribā*/ربا) to pay for medical emergencies, cover household expenses after an unexpected job loss, or to stay afloat while trying to avoid foreclosure. Latest credit card debt statistics show that American families collectively owe just under \$1 trillion to credit card companies.

And “freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose and feeling good is good enough for me and Bobby McGee.”



So is this the freedom that led George W. Bush to say that the whole world “envies us our freedom”? And is this the freedom that prevails in the land of the free and the home of the brave?

Freedom quickly emerged as the official explanation for the war against terrorism. “Freedom itself is under attack,” President Bush announced in his speech to Congress of Sept. 21, 2001.

The National Security Strategy begins not with a discussion of global politics or the doctrine of preemptive war, but with an invocation of freedom, defined as political democracy, freedom of expression, religious toleration and free enterprise. These, the document proclaims, “are right and true for every person in every society.” and that American freedom is universally applicable. Deeply embedded in American culture is the idea that the United States has a mission to spread this *freedom* throughout the world.

Certain questions arise here: does democracy as defined by the New World Order truly achieve the freedom that mankind desires and requires? Does it raise the level of freedom that people enjoy? What is the type of freedom that democracy achieves for nations, and where are its boundaries? Are citizens of the ‘first world’ industrialized nations truly free? Are the lives that they live in those nations lives of freedom, or even partly so? Does ʾIslām oppose the principle of freedom or does it approve of it and call for it? If ʾIslām does approve of it, then how does it deal with it and expect people to practice it, and what are the permissible types of freedom within ʾIslāmic boundaries? Is freedom in ʾIslām the same as that in democracy, or are they different? Which one of the two ‘freedoms’ is more realistic and coincides with the sought after freedom?

The limited human mind is what has defined freedom in democracy and decided what is good and what is bad according to its own desires and lusts. The result is that freedom in democracy becomes limited at times and is broadened at others, depending only on what decision makers feel is, in their thought, beneficial at the time.

This means that the nations who practice such systems become experimental laboratories and are in a state constant flux regarding what is allowed and what is not.

In the New World Order freedom is opposed to and conflicts with whatever is defined as evil by human legislators, which, due to their limited knowledge and abilities, entails the inclusion of much evil in the circle of what is good and allowable. It also implies that much good will be included in the circle of the evil and forbidden.

Under many so-called democracies, many evil things have been made permissible based on how freedom is defined, but are later found to be immoral and oppressive, which causes them to then be prohibited. Likewise, many matters that were later found to be beneficial were initially prohibited. This constant fluctuation causes the freedom in democracy to be relative to a moment in time.

In ʾIslām on the other hand, freedom is clearly defined and its limits, and boundaries, are set by Allāh ﷻ alone, Who is the infallible Creator of the whole universe and all creation and Whose Qualities are perfect and beyond defect, weakness or incapability.

Thus, freedom in ʾIslām has a distinct feature, which is stability – what was permissible in ʾIslām 1400 years ago remains so until the Day of Resurrection, as does what is prohibited.

In ʾIslām we all know what we can and cannot do as well as the grey areas in which there is room for flexibility, according to what Allāh ﷻ has ordained. Furthermore, freedom in ʾIslām is underpinned by ultimate justice and authority because it comes from Allāh ﷻ, contrary to that defined by democracy, which is man-made and therefore fallible and subject to shortcomings and injustice. In Euro/American democracy, the limits of freedom only move within the circle that has been defined solely by human legislators.

In democracy, as we said, freedom is opposed to and conflicts with whatever is defined as evil by human legislators. The problem with this is precisely that legislators are “human” and thus fallible and prone not only to making mistakes in their decisions but also, due to their concupiscence, to legislate only for their own narrow interests

Conversely, in ʾIslām, freedom is opposed to and conflicts with whatever Allāh ﷻ has defined as evil due to His comprehensive Knowledge and infallibility. Allāh ﷻ has permitted only what is good and beneficial for mankind and has prohibited only what is evil and ultimately destructive. Consequently, the range of freedom in ʾIslām is only from what is good to what is praiseworthy.

Freedom in democracy serves to enslave people to one another due to the tyranny of the majority, which causes people to be under the control of others who may be of lesser intelligence and understanding than themselves; those who are in control are the ones who set the rules and forbid and allow whatever they wish – all that those who are under such control can do is to submit and obey. What freedom is this which entails enslavement to other humans?

In ʾIslām, freedom frees us from enslavement to other humans in favor of complete enslavement to Allāh ﷻ alone. One might argue that both are forms of enslavement; so what is the difference?

Allāh ﷻ is the Creator; Allāh ﷻ provides for us, facilitates the universe for us and guides us to the right path; therefore, Allāh ﷻ alone has the right to be worshipped as it is Allāh ﷻ alone Who is the source of our existence and very being.

Worshipping the Creator gives the slave honor, dignity and might while on the other hand, being enslaved by other humans who are precisely human is, ultimately, a form of oppression and punishment.

The difference lies in to whom or what one is enslaved – Allāh ﷻ or another human; and why would we willingly consent to be a slave of another human when we could be the slave of the Creator?

Humans are created with the natural disposition of being a slave, servant or a worshipper (عبد/°abd), so if we are not slaves or worshippers of Allāh ﷻ, then we will certainly become a slave to another human, and this is a false state of affairs, regardless of the form it takes and the rank of the human to whom one is enslaved.

Thus worshipping Allāh ﷻ represents the ultimate freedom because it frees one from being enslaved to other humans and false gods. In spurious democracy, so-called freedom places us under various types of pressures and external strains that in the end cause us to lose a great portion of our true freedom both of thought and choice.

On the contrary as self declared slaves (عباد الله/°ubādullāh) of Allāh ﷻ we are freed from all external pressures and effects that might limit or even deprive of us of our freedom of choice and decision.

The freedom of New World Order democracy exposes us all to evils, corruption, and other things that could ruin our good morals and pure natures; on the other hand, in °Islām, freedom offers us a cause to adopt the finest and most courteous morals and behaviour.

Freedom in democracy appears as tho, through the voting process, one gives a fellow human a gift (vote), and in turn the recipient of that gift then has a right to take as much as he wants whenever it suits him. In °Islām however, it is a right that Allāh ﷻ has granted to His slaves, and no human has the right to deprive others of it except for a reason that is legislated or prescribed by Allāh ﷻ.

As Muslims we should keep in mind that behavior should always be in accordance with the ordained principles and moral values of the Creator of the Universe. A truly divine civilization is that which is ordained by Allāh ﷻ. All humans are in Truth, whatever they might think to the contrary and whatever airs they might put on, are slaves, servants and worshippers of Allāh ﷻ. Who alone has full authority over every person who was, is or will be.

Within the framework of obedience to the Will of Allāh ﷻ, we can live a life founded on peace, justice, mercy, love and wisdom and exercise our divinely given rights of freedom in every dimension and aspect of our daily behavior.

The necessity to think through our actions and accept responsibility for them is clearly specified in the prophetic tradition:

“If you decide to do something, set your mind on doing it, think of its outcome. If it is honest, go ahead. But if it is dishonest, refrain from doing it.”

The Way of ʿIslām encourages freedom of thought, speech, politics, economy, and individual conduct, but insists that this freedom encompass a sense of responsibility and commitment. By doing so, ʿIslām aims to build strong, unwavering people of character, who are secure in their own self knowledge and firm enough to resist imitating others and their seductive but, ultimately, morally unethical codes of behavior. Such people have confidence in themselves and their divinely inspired values and, as a result, their behavior reflects and manifests this strength.

From this perspective freedom, our ability to do something or abstain from it is based upon our own free will. It is a special quality enjoyed by every truly rational being. With it, a person acts without the interference of others, because that person is not owned by anyone – not on the individual level, or on the level of the state, society, family etc. – but instead one voluntarily recognizes and accepts that all and everyone are, in Truth, really owned by Allāh ﷻ.

As long as our activities do not transgress the rights of others, we are left to dispose of our affairs in every matter that is of personal significance without fearing injury to person, property, or reputation. Personal freedom implies the existence of two things: sanctity and security of the self.

As for sanctity of the self, ʿIslām places great emphasis on human dignity, and grants human beings a lofty status, enjoining people to show respect for others and refrain from belittling in accord with the ḥadīth, “A Muslim is a brother of another Muslim. So he should not oppress him or hand him over to an oppressor. And whoever fulfills the needs of his brother, Allāh will fulfill his needs.” (Bukhārī)

In addition to the concept of sanctity of the self, security of the self is also very important in °Islām because Allāh ﷻ guarantees the safety of the person's life, honor, and wealth. Therefore, we are forbidden to kill, injure, or transgress against any other human being. It does not matter whether this injury is physical, like torture, beatings or imprisonment, or psychological, like verbal or sexual abuse.

°Anās bin Mālik ؓ related that the Messenger ﷺ said, “Help your brother be he an oppressor or be he oppressed.” A man said, ‘Oh Rasūl! I will help him if he is oppressed, but if he is an oppressor, how shall I help him?’ The Messenger ﷺ said, ‘By preventing him from oppressing (others). That is how to help him.’” (Bukḥārī)

°Islām places the human being on the highest level. For this reason, °Islām considers transgression against one person to be transgression against society as a whole. Likewise, it considers concern for one person to be concern for society as a whole. Allāh ﷻ says:

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَٰلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَٰئِيلَ
أَنَّهُ مَن قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ
فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا

...min °ajālī dḥalika katabnā °ala banī °isrā°ila
°annahu man qatala nafsān bi-ghayri nafsīn °aw fasādīn fī-l-arḍi
fa-kānnamā qatala -n-nāsa jamī°ā
wa man °aḥyāhā fa-kānnamā °aḥya-n-nasa jamī°ā

...on account of that We decreed for the Children of Israel
that if someone kills another person
unless it is in retaliation for someone else
– or for causing corruption in the earth –
it is as if he had murdered all mankind.
And if anyone gives life to another person,
it is as if he had given life to all mankind.

(Sūratu-l-Mā°ida 5:32)

This recognition of human dignity applies to everyone, whether male or female, ruler or subject. It is a right of every human being, regardless of color, race, nation or religion. Even an orphan in the street must be taken in on account of that intrinsic human worth.

If we find a child abandoned on the street, we are obliged by Allāh ﷻ to take that child in. If no member of the community does this, then everyone in the community is sinful and they are all responsible before Allāh ﷻ for the suffering of that child.

In the same way ʾIslām emphasizes the dignity of every human being both during his or her lifetime and after their death. Allāh ﷻ forbids mutilating a corpse and commands that all bodies be prepared for burial and then properly buried.

To prevent all forms of abuse and create an environment where people can exercise their personal freedom, Allāh ﷻ prescribes disciplinary measures and punishments for offenders. The greater the transgression, the sterner the punishment will be. For example, the punishment for murder is retribution in kind. Allāh ﷻ says:

وَكَتَبْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ فِيهَا أَنَّ النَّفْسَ بِالنَّفْسِ وَالْعَيْنَ بِالْعَيْنِ وَالْأَنْفَ بِالْأَنْفِ
وَالْأُذُنَ بِالْأُذُنِ وَالسِّنَّ بِالسِّنِّ وَالْجُرُوحَ قِصَاصٌ ؕ
فَمَنْ تَصَدَّقَ بِهِ فَهُوَ كَفَّارَةٌ لَهُ ؕ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَحْكَمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ
فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

wa katabnā ʿalayhim fihā ʾanna-n-nafsa bi-n-nafsi

wa-l-ʿayna bi-l-ʿayni wa-l-ʾanfa bi-l-anfi

wa-l-ʾudḥuna bi-l-ʾudḥuni wa-s-sinna bi-s-sinni wa-l-jurūḥa qīṣāṣ:

fa man taṣaddaqa bihi fa huwa kaffāratul-lah;

wa mal-lam yaḥkum bi-māā ʾaṅzala-llāhu

fa-ʾūlaʾika humu ḍḡ-ḍḡālimūn

We prescribed for them in [the Torah]*:

“A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose,
an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and retaliation for wounds. But
if anyone forgoes that as a charity, it will act as expiation for him.

Those who do not judge by what Allāh has sent down,
such people are oppressors.”

(Sūratu-l-Māāʾida 5:32)

[*The phrase, “an eye for an eye”, (*ayin tachat ayin*, literally ‘eye under eye’ עין תחת עין), is a quotation from Leviticus 24:19–21 and Deuteronomy 19:16–21 in the *Tanakh* (Old Testament/תנ"ך)]



Freedom to travel, as an individual at will within one's own country and outside of it without any impediment in guaranteed by ʿIslāmīc law. It is a natural right of a human being to be able to depart and return. In fact, it is a requirement of life to be able to do so because it is often necessary to earn a livelihood, find employment, seek knowledge, visit family and friends and achieve many other things.

The freedom of movement is a quality of all living things. It is a necessary part of what it means to be alive. Freedom of movement is established in the Qurʾān, Sunnah, and by the consensus of the jurists. Regarding this freedom Allāh ﷻ says:

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ مَهْدًا وَسَلَكَ لَكُمْ فِيهَا سُبُلًا

alladhī jaʿala lakumu-l-ʿarḍa mahdañ-wa salaka lakum fīha subulā

He Who has made for you the earth like a carpet spread out
and threaded pathways for you through it.

(Sūrah Ṭa Ha 20:53)

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ بِسَاطًا • لَتَسْلُكُوا مِنْهَا سُبُلًا فِجَاجًا

wa-llāhu jaʿala lakumu-l-arda bisātā • li-taslukū minhā subulan fijājā

And Allāh has made the earth for you as a carpet (spread out),
so that you could use its wide valleys as roadways.

(Sūrah Nūḥ 71:19-20)

هُوَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ ذُلُولًا
فَامْشُوا فِي مَنَاكِبِهَا وَكُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِهِ ۚ وَإِلَيْهِ النُّشُورُ

huwal-ladhī jaʿala lakumu-l-ʿarḍa dhalūlan
fa-m-shū fī manākibihā wa kulū mir-rizqihi wa-īlayhi-n-nushūr

He is the One who made the Earth subservient for you.
So roam its paths, and eat from His provisions;
and to Him is the final summoning.

(Sūratu-l-Mulk 67:15)

No one should be prohibited from movement except for an over-riding consideration of the general welfare. For instance when a plague struck Syria, Umar ؓ prohibited travel to those lands.

He commanded this in order to carry out the instructions of the Prophet ﷺ during such times, since ʿAbdu-r-Raḥmān bin ʿAuf told him that the Prophet ﷺ said, “If you hear the news of an outbreak of an epidemic (plague) in a certain place, do not enter that place: and if the epidemic falls in a place while you are present in it, do not leave that place to escape from the epidemic.” (Bukḥarī)

And also Usama bin Zaid, speaking to Ṣaʿd, related that the Prophet ﷺ said about the plague, “It is a means of punishment with which some nations were punished and some of it has remained, and it appears now and then. So whoever hears that there is an outbreak of plague in some land, he should not go to that land, and if the plague breaks out in the land where one is already present, one should not run away from that land, escaping from the plague.” (Bukḥarī)

Further regarding people’s freedom of movement, ʾIslām, in order to facilitate free movement, prohibits any transgression being committed against travelers or hindrance being placed in their way. For the same reason, ʾIslāmic law prescribes extremely stern punishment for highway robbery.

In order to facilitate use of the roadways, the Prophet ﷺ forbade his Companions from sitting down in the middle of them. According to Saʿid al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Beware! Avoid sitting on the roads (ways).” The people said, “There is no way out of it as these are our sitting places and where we talk.” The Prophet ﷺ said, “If you must sit there, then observe the rights of the way.” They asked, “What are the rights of the way?” He said, “They are the lowering of your gazes, refraining from harming people, returning greetings, enjoining the good and forbidding evil.” (Bukḥarī)

Due to the importance of travel in the life of a Muslim and due to the fact that unforeseen problems often occur during travel, Allāh ﷻ has granted the wayfarer a right to a share of the obligatory alms (*zakāt* / زكاة). This is if the traveler is in dire need of it, even if this person is affluent in his or her own land.

This payment of *zakāt* is specifically for the traveler or wayfarer (*ibni-s-sabīl*) who is left stranded and who can be paid *zakāt* to ensure his return to his homeland. The payment should include the fare and personal expenses as is customary.

The payment of this form of *zakāt* is on condition that his travel was not of the sort which is unlawful, and that the traveller is unable to borrow money, and that he is not in a position to sell his own property back home, as a matter of obligatory precaution.

Freedom of travel is balanced by freedom of residence in °Islām which provides that any person who is capable of securing a place of residence for themselves has the freedom to do so. Likewise, the °*ummah* (community/state/nation) should provide suitable housing for any people who are incapable of doing so, in order that they can have at least a minimal standard of living.

Sa'id al-Khudrī رضى الله عنه relates that the Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever has excess shelter should provide shelter for one who has none, and whoever has excess provisions should provide for one who has none.” (Bukhārī)

The jurist Ibn Hazm uses this ḥadīth and others as proof that the affluent Muslims are expected to provide for the needs of the poor when the obligatory alms funds and tributes are insufficient to address their basic needs. These needs are food, drink, clothing, fuel and shelter from the heat and cold. The prominent people in society and in government are responsible to collect these funds and distribute them to the needy, both Muslim and, importantly, non-Muslim, because the fulfillment of these basic needs is a universal right of all humanity. Every member of society should be guaranteed these things.

When a person owns a home, it is not permissible for anyone else, not even the ruler, to break into that home or enter it without the owner's permission except under the direst circumstances relating to public safety. Allāh says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا
وَتَسَلِّمُوا عَلَى أَهْلِهَا ؕ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

yā ayyuha-lladhīna °āmanū
lā tadḥkḥulū buyūtan ḡhayra buyūtikum
ḥatta tasta°nisū wa tusallimū °alā° ahlihā ;
dḥalikum ḡhayrul-lakum la° allakum tadḥakkarūn

حرية — Freedom

Oh you who have come to believe!
Do not enter houses other than your own
until you have asked permission and greeted their inhabitants.
That is better for you, so that hopefully you will pay heed.

(Sūratu-n-Nūr 24:27)

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَجِدُوا فِيهَا أَحَدًا فَلَا تَدْخُلُوهَا حَتَّى يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ ۖ وَإِنْ قِيلَ
لَكُمْ ارْجِعُوا فَارْجِعُوا ۚ هُوَ أَزْكَى لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ

fāā°-il-lam tajidū fihāā °ahadan

fa-lā tadħkħulūhā ḥattā yu°dħana lakum ;

wa-in qīla lakumu °irji°ū fāā°irji°ū ; huwa azkayā lakum ;

wa-llāhu bi-mā ta°malūna °alīm

And if you find no one present,
then do not enter their homes until you receive permission.
If you are told to go back, then do so because this is purer for you.
And Allāh knows well all that you do.

(Sūratu-n-Nūr 24:28)

If entering houses without permission is forbidden, confiscating or destroying the homes of others is even more heinous. The only exception to this is when the general welfare of society rests upon doing so. In these cases, the homes can be taken as long as fair compensation is given to the owners.

There are many instances where the general welfare might require the acquisition of others' homes. It might be necessary to complete such projects as expanding a mosque, constructing a needed road, or building a hospital. °Umar al-Kḥattāb ؓ displaced the people of Najran and compensated them with places within the city of Kufah.

To protect the sanctity of the home, All forms of spying and undue suspicion are strictly prohibited by Allāh ﷻ.

Concerning this Allāh ﷻ says:



وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا ۚ

wa lā tajassasū wa lā yagħtab ba°ḍukum ba°ḍā

Do not spy, and do not backbite one another.

(Sūratu-l-Ḥujjarat 49:12)

حرية — Freedom

Spying violates the rights of others by violating the sanctity of the home and compromising the inhabitants' personal freedom. ʾIslāmic law goes so far in preserving the sanctity of the home that it waives the right to retribution or blood money in cases where the home of another has been spied upon. Abu Hurairah  related that Prophet  said: “Whoever looks into the home of another without permission, then put out his eye, there will be no compensation for the eye.” Even though the eye of a human being is sacred and the monetary damages that ʾIslām demands from one who damages the eyes of another are great, they are waived in this case because the eyes were used to violate the rights of another.

Freedom of Ownership

Possession is where a person is able to dispose of something and benefit from it in any legally sanctioned manner. There are various types of property and various legitimate ways of acquiring it, all of which can be summarized as follows:

Types of property

Property or possession is of two types, private and public. Private property is where an individual has something and has the exclusive right to benefit from it.

ʾIslām grants the individual the right to possess and this right is a fundamental principle of ʾIslāmic Law.

In ʾIslāmic law the natural consequences of private ownership are acknowledged, like the need to preserve private ownership and safeguard properties from seizure, theft, and misappropriation. ʾIslāmic law sets stern punishments for transgressing against another's property in order to safeguard the right to private property.

There are other consequences of private ownership that ʾIslāmic law addresses, like the freedom to dispose of one's property through buying, selling, leasing, mortgaging, gifting, bequeathing, and other types of legitimate commercial behavior.

ʾIslāmic law however, does not leave private ownership completely unregulated. It sets down a number of regulations to ensure that the rights of others are not violated. For example, ʾIslāmic law prohibits usury, fraud, bribery, hoarding, and other harmful practices.

حرية — Freedom

This concept of freedom to own property applies to both men and women. Allāh ﷻ says:

لِلرِّجَالِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبُوا وَلِلنِّسَاءِ نَصِيبٌ مِّمَّا اكْتَسَبَ

li-r-rijālī naṣībum-mimma ʾiktasabū
wa li-n-nisāʾi naṣībum-mimma ʾiktasab

Men have a share in what they earn
and women have a share in what they earn.

(Sūratu-n-Nisāʾa 4:32)

As for public property, it is possessed by the society at large, or by a sector of the society. All people in society benefit from it collectively and no individual has an exclusive right to any part of it.

This type of property includes masājīd, hospitals, public roads, rivers, oceans, and the public treasury (*baytu-l-māl*) which are to be used for the benefit of the public. Such properties are not to be used for the benefit of political leaders or other individuals. No one should interfere with such properties without a legally valid reason, like managing the property and employing it for the common good.

Means of Acquiring Property

The legitimate means of acquiring property are those that are specifically recognized by ʾIslāmīc law. All other ways of acquiring property are forbidden. The legitimate means of acquisition can be broken down into two categories: private and public.

Private acquisition can occur in two different situations. The first is where the wealth concerned is already the property of another. The second is where it is not. Wealth that is the property of another cannot be transferred from its owner to another except for a legitimate reason. These reasons include the transfer of property as a result of inheritance, bequests, preemption, contractual obligation, or by a free-will gift.

Wealth that has never been the property of another cannot become someone elses property except through a legal financial process that leads to possession. This would include developing barren lands, hunting wild game, extracting mineral wealth from the earth, and being allotted unclaimed wealth by way of a government charter.

Personal ownership is also subject to the following conditions:

1. The owner must continue to use the property productively. Neglecting the property is harmful even to the owner and using it productively is beneficial to all of society.
2. The owner must pay the necessary zakāt. If the person possesses a certain amount of wealth, it may be subject to the zakāt, which is considered a right of the wealth in itself.
3. The owner must avoid all prohibited means of acquiring wealth, like interest, fraud, and cornering the market through hoarding.
4. The owner should not squander (إسْرِيف/سرف) their wealth nor should they be excessively stingy (بُخِيل/bukhīl) with it.

As for the public acquisition of wealth, it manifests itself in many ways. The first of these are the natural resources that are readily available to everyone without much effort, like water, public pasture land, and fire.

The second of these are resources that are protected and maintained by the state for the general benefit. This includes such things as graveyards, military bases, government agencies, public endowments, and charitable funds.

Then there are those resources not owned by anyone and resources that were previously owned then fell under a long period of neglect, like undeveloped land.

Finally there are those resources acquired by the state through military effort, like the spoils of war.

Freedom of Work

Employment means a permissible way of making a living. It holds a high honor among the various activities of life. Therefore, °Islāmic law recognizes the individual's right to engage in any field of work he or she wishes unless this leads to a conflict of interests or causes harm or is detrimental to society.

Due to the importance of work in °Islām, it is considered a form of struggle (*jihād* / جِهَاد). Ka°ab bin Ajazah ؓ relates that a man passed the Prophet ﷺ and the Companions ؓ saw how hard working and industrious he was. They said: "O Messenger, if only he were doing this much work for the sake of Allāh ﷻ..."

The Prophet ﷺ then said: “If he is working to support his small children, then it is for the sake of Allāh ﷻ. If he is working to support his elderly parents, then it is for the sake of Allāh ﷻ. If he is working to occupy himself and keep his desires in check, then it is for the sake of Allāh ﷻ. If, on the other hand, he is doing so to show off and earn fame, then he is working for the sake of Shāyṭān.”

We find in the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth many texts that speak about employment and praise any number of occupations, like metalworking, shipbuilding, hauling or shipping, buying and selling and agriculture. The reason for this is that such effort or work is a means for survival. Survival is a necessary condition for the greatest purpose in life, worshipping Allāh ﷻ and seeking His pleasure. The greatness of this objective elevates the means needed to attain it.

The greatest objective is the pleasure of Allāh ﷻ, and work and sacrifice are the greatest means of attaining it. Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān praises work and earning a livelihood to show the great benefits that it brings, its importance for human survival, and that it is among the greatest blessings for humanity from Allāh ﷻ.

Freedom of Education

Allāh ﷻ requires the individual to seek knowledge and has granted every individual the right to seek an education. Allāh ﷻ has placed no restrictions on this as long as the knowledge sought is of benefit to the Muslims in their lives as “knowledge is the lost property of the Muslim and whoever finds it must take it.” (at-Tirmidhī)

As for knowledge that yields no benefit, but may even cause harm, it is forbidden for the Muslim to seek it. All forms of magic (*sīḥr*/سحر) and fortune telling (الكهانة) fall under this category.

Knowledge and education are of great importance for life evidenced by the very first verse revealed to the Prophet ﷺ

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ • خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ •
اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ • الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ • عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

°iqra° bi-°s-mi rabbika-lladhī khalaqā; khalaqa-l-°insāna min °alaqā;
°iqra° wa rabbuka-l-°akram; °alladhī °allama bi-l-qalām;
°allama -l-°insāna mā lam ya°lam

حرية — Freedom

Read in the Name of your Lord who created
– created man from a drop –

Read and your Lord is Most Generous – Who taught by the Pen.
Taught the human what he knew not.

(Sūratu-l-ʿAlaqā 96:1-4)

As is well known, reading is the key to knowledge and for this reason the Prophet ﷺ would pardon any prisoner of war from among the disbelievers if they would teach the Muslim children of Madīnah how to read and write.

One of the great qualities of ʿIslām is that it opens up the doors of knowledge for humanity and encourages us to walk through them and progress as far as we can. Allāh ﷻ hates the neglect of knowledge and consequent ignorance. For this reason, it is the responsibility of the ʿummah to provide people with educational opportunities and guarantee everyone their right to an education in accord with ḥadīth, “Knowledge is the lost property of the Muslim.”

Political Freedom

This refers to the freedom of the people to choose and elect their political leadership, as well as their right to monitor and criticize the performance of that leadership and to remove it whenever it deviates from the Laws of Allāh ﷻ and turns away from justice.

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ
وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۚ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

wa-l-takun minkum ʿummatun yadʿūna ʿila-l-khayri
wa yaʿmurūna bi-l-maʿrūfi wa yanhawna ʿani-l-munkar;
wa ʿulāāʾika humu-l-mufliḥūn

“Let there arise from you a community inviting to all that is good,
enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong:
they are the ones to attain felicity”

(Sūrah ʿĀl ʿImrān 3:104)

The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever of you sees an evil must change it with his hand. If he is not able to do so, then [he must change it] with his tongue. And if he is not able to do so, then [he must change it] with his heart. And that is the slightest [effect of] faith.” (Muslim and ibn Majah as narrated by ʿAbū Saʿīd al-Khudrī رضي الله عنه)

Likewise, it is our right to participate in carrying out the responsibilities of the government, because political authority is a collective right of all citizens. It is not the exclusive privilege or inherited right of any individual or group of people. The selection of the political leadership may also occur as a result of appointment or the consultation of experts by the people.

Among these affairs is that of making juristic decisions on issues that are not directly addressed by Qur'ān or Ḥadīth. The political leadership must refer to scholars who act out of awareness of Allāh ﷻ (*al-ʿulemāʾ al-muttaqī*/العلماء المتقي) meaning scholars who are conscious of Allāh ﷻ, and willfully avoid acts that lead to the degeneration of this consciousness and consciously undertake those actions that will strengthen it, as opposed to the compliant scholars who slavishly serve the rulers and despots, keep their mouths shut and don't rock the boat. In the same way, the leadership must refer and defer to *al-ʿulemāʾ al-muttaqī* as well as the people who loose and bind or *ahl al-hal wal ʿaqd*¹ in matters of serious general importance, like declaring war, making peace, concluding a treaty, establishing diplomatic ties, drafting a budget, and granting public assistance to certain sectors of the population. Allāh ﷻ says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا
وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا بِالْعَدْلِ

ʿinna-llāha yaʾmurukum ʾān tuʾaddu-l-ʾamānāti ʾilā ʾahlihā
wa ʾidḥa ḥakamtum bayna-n-nāsi ʾan taḥkumū bi-l-ʿadl

Allāh commands you

to return to their owners the things you hold on trust and,
when you judge between people, to judge with justice.

(Sūratu-n-Nisāʾ 4:58)

The Prophet ﷺ said: “Religion is sincerity.” The Companions asked: “To whom, Oh Prophet?” He replied: “To Allāh, His Book, the Prophet, the leaders of the Muslims, and to the people.” (Muslim)

1. Arabic term that was introduced in classic Islāmic political literature and is increasingly referred to in recent times to refer to people of authority in the Muslim ʿummah who are obliged to carry on several duties affecting the community, the most important of which is to choose the Muslim ruler.

حرية — Freedom

So in general we can say that in ʾIslām the meaning of freedom is a person's ability to do something or abstain from it based first of all on this ʾāyat:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ

lāā ʾikrāha fi-d-dīn

there is no compulsion in religion

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:256)

Further, freedom, as such, is a special quality enjoyed by all of us. It enables us to act without the interference of anyone because no one of us are owned by or are enslaved to anyone either on an individual level or at the level of the state, society, community or family.

This recognition of freedom within ʾIslām does not imply that we are left free of all restrictions and guidelines, because that kind of 'freedom' is, as we have already discussed, mere anarchy that gives free reign to lusts and evil desires. It is well known that these vain desires bring more harm to the human being than they do good.

For this reason, Allāh ﷻ forbids a person to force someone to follow him because no one's freedom can be granted at the expense of another. Everyone must be given freedom on both the individual and social levels. For this reason, Allāh ﷻ prescribes certain rules and guidelines that guarantee freedom for all. These guidelines can be outlined in the following manner:

- A. The freedom of individuals and communities must never jeopardize the general order of society or destroy its foundations.
- B. The freedom of individuals or communities must never cause the loss of more general rights. This is in consideration of the intrinsic values and rights of all members of the community (ʾummah).
- C. No one's freedom should violate the freedom of others.

These regulations and guidelines, many of which we have clarified by various ʾāyāt in the Qurʾān, show that Allāh ﷻ does not prescribe individual freedom at the expense of the community, nor does it establish freedoms for the community at the expense of the individual. Instead, Allāh ﷻ calls for balance between the two, where everyone receives their just due in accord with the principles of Divine Justice and Mercy reflected on the human plane.



All of what we have said or written up to this point refers to the more outward aspects of freedom in view of what Allāh ﷻ has said and which the Prophet ﷺ has demonstrated in his *sunnah* and the general understanding (*ijmā'*) of the community and its scholars.

Now I want to talk and write about the inner dimensions of freedom that underlie and undergird all of that which has gone heretofore.

In a *khutbah* given by Shaykh Muḥammad Ninowy, he tells the following story, “One of the pious scholars from over a 1000 years ago as well as teaching young scholars to be, also taught kids. One day he told the kids ‘go and hide in a place where no one sees you.’

“They all ran and hid, except for one kid who came to the teacher and said: ‘You told us to “hide where no one sees you.” But Allāh ﷻ always sees me so I can’t find any place to hide.”

His teacher then taught him three things which are lessons for us all. He taught the boy (who, in time, himself became a scholar). Before you sleep always remember to say seven times !

Allāh is watching me, (*Allāhu Nadḥiri*/الله نظري)

Allāh is with me, (*Allāhu Ma'ī*/الله معي)

Allāh sees me (*Allāhu Shāhidlī*/الله شهد لي).”

What, you might ask, does this have to do with freedom?

If freedom, which according to most new world order thought, starts from ‘liberation’ from outer constraints only to end in slavery to one’s own inner temptations and desires, then it follows that by pursuing such freedom, we would gradually destroy our selves for a spurious liberty equated with satisfying the desires of the animal within our depths, and in the end the pursuit of such freedom would make us to be simply the tools of satisfying those desires.

If, on the other hand, we understand, as we mentioned at the beginning, that freedom according to Allāh ﷻ is quite the opposite, and starts, not with an apocryphal liberation, but in a total and pure submission to Allāh ﷻ that ends with liberation from all forms of humiliating slavery and the liberation of the human being from the unredeemed inner content of our own self that might be worth while.

In truth we become actually and truly free when we learn to consciously control our path and maintain for our real and intrinsic humanity the right to determine that path and manifest the characteristics and directions of that path in all of our actions.

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ

wa bashshiri-l-ladhīna ʿamanū wa ʿamilu-ṣ-ṣalīhāti
ʿanna lahum jannātīn tajārī min taḥtiha-l-ʿanhār

And give good news to those who believe and do good works,
that they will have gardens with rivers flowing beneath.

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:25)

This depends, above all, on liberation from the slavery of the desires which occupy the self so that desire, properly focused, may turn into a force which attracts to us what we like rather than a repelling power which only exhausts our will, potential or abilities.

And, paradoxically to the modern mind, this liberation proceeds precisely from surrender and submission, rather than the other way around posited by modern thought about freedom and liberation.

If we start with the secret of human freedom which grows out of submission to the Divine, and nourish it and cause it to grow, we will bring our selves to the awareness that the purpose of life is much more sublime than that destiny which is driven by lower desires of the self (*nafsa-l-ʿammara* نَفْسَ لَأَمَّارَة), and that this principle is the purpose of whose achievement the human actually is created, and as such is much, much more elevated than those trivial objectives and cheap gains which we can achieve through pursuing material or purely sensual pleasures. It is in this way that the donkey must be trained so that eventually it will bear its rider to the goal.

If we do this until the self (*nafsa*) is liberated from the slavery of its own desires and by so doing free our self from the captivating influence of the will, a self will arise that can say “Yes” or “No” without the mouth being suppressed or the hand chained by the temporary desire for the cheap thrill. This is exactly what Allāh ﷻ in the Qurʾān has said in defining for us the unique criteria and principles which will help us to raise our selves beyond our limited goals to vaster horizons and more sublime objectives.

زَيْنَ لِلنَّاسِ حُبُّ الشَّهَوَاتِ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ وَالْبَنِينَ
وَالْقَنَاطِيرِ الْمُقَنْطَرَةِ مِنَ الذَّهَبِ وَالْفِضَّةِ
وَالْخَيْلِ الْمُسَوَّمَةِ وَالْأَنْعَامِ وَالْحَرْثِ
• ذَلِكَ مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الْمَالِ
قُلْ أَوْفَيْتُكُمْ بِخَيْرٍ مِّنْ ذَلِكُمْ
لِّلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا
وَأَزْوَاجٌ مُّطَهَّرَةٌ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ
• وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ

zuyyina li-n-nāsi ḥubbu-sh-shahawāti mina-n-nisāʾi wa-l-banīna
wa-l-qanātīri-l-muqanṭarati mina-l-dh-dḥahabi wa-l-fiḍḍati
wa-l-khayli-l-musawwamati wa-l-ʾanʾāmi wa-l-ḥarṭhi
dḥalika matāʾu-l-ḥayāti-d-dunyā wa-llāhu ʿīndahu ḥusnu-l-maʾābā
qul ʾaʾunabbiʾukum bi-khayrim-min dḥalikum?
li-l-ladḥīna-t-taqaw ʿīnda rabbihim jannātuñ
tajārī miñ taḥtiha-l-ʾanhāru kḥalidīna fihā
wa ʾazwājum-muṭaḥharatuñw-wa riḍwānum-mina-llāh;
wa-llāhu baṣīrum-bi-l-ʿibādā

Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet:
women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver;
horses branded (for blood and excellence);
and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land.
Such are the possessions of life of this world;
but nearness to Allāh is the best of goals.
Say: "Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those?"
For the righteous there are gardens in nearness to their Lord,
with rivers flowing beneath;
therein is their eternal home; with companions pure (and holy)
and the good pleasure of Allah,
for Allah is well aware of [all] His servants.
(Sūrah ʾĀl ʿImrān 3:14-15)

The spiritual jihād is a spiritual war that we all need to wage to restrain our own selfish desires and in order not to be overcome in the face of the entrapment and tricks of the Shayṭān and the evil-self (*nafsa-l-ʿāmmāratum-bi-s-sūʾ*). The purpose of the spiritual jihād, which is also called the Greater Jihād or the *Jihādu-l-ʿAkbar*, is to fight against the evil-self and the Shayṭān during our whole lifetime; it is to be a pure servant on the right path, a benevolent Muslim, a virtuous and self-perfected human being, by purifying our *nafsa-l-ʿāmmārah bi-s-sūʾ* from all sorts of temptations. The spiritual jihād means to strengthen the order of the inner world and wash our hearts from dirt and evil, and attempt to rid our selves of every sort of evil. The spiritual jihād, which aims at improving and amending our own inner world, is part of the responsibility of being human.

Spiritual struggle is a constant necessity for all Muslims. Spiritual struggle is to endeavor to have the consciousness of servitude within constancy. The importance of this spiritual struggle (*jihād*) is clearly emphasized throughout the Qurʾān and aḥadīth as in:

فَاسْتَقِمُّ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ وَمَنْ تَابَ مَعَكَ وَلَا تَطْغَوْا ۚ إِنَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

fāaʾistaqim kamāa ʾumirta wa man tāba maʿaka wa lā taṭṭhaw;
ʾinnahu bi-mā taʿmalūna baṣīr

“Therefore stand firm (in the straight path) as you are commanded!”
(Surah Hūd, 11:112)

The Prophet ﷺ says, “Surah Hūd aged me.” (Tirmidhī, *Tafsīr*, part 56) and thus expressed the importance of keeping to the right path as Allāh ﷻ commands:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا • فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا •
قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا • وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا •

wa nafsiñw-wa mā sawwāhā • faʾalhamahā fujūrahā wa taqwāhā •
qadā ʾaflaḥa man zakkāhā • wa qadā khāba man dassāhā •

By the self and He Who perfected it,
and inspired it with depravity or consciousness,
he who purifies it has succeeded, and ruined is he who corrupts it.
(Sūratu-sh-Ṣhams, 91:1-10)

حرية — Freedom

The Prophet ﷺ indicates the importance of the struggle (*jihād*) against the evil-self in his saying, “The mujāhid is the one who struggles against his evil-self.” And Allāh ﷻ warns people seriously with His verses in the Holy Qur’an against the evil of one’s self,

إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ

°inna-n-nafsa-l-°āmmāratum-bi-s-sūū°

The self indeed commands to evil acts

(Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:53)

وَأْمِنُوا بِمَا أَنزَلْتُ مُصَدِّقًا لِّمَا مَعَكُمْ وَلَا تَكُونُوا أَوَّلَ كَافِرٍ بِهِ
وَلَا تَشْتَرُوا بِآيَاتِي ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا وَإِيَّايَ فَاتَّقُونَ

wāā-°aminū bimāā °aanzaltu muṣaddiqal-limā ma°akum

wa lā takūnūū °awwala kāfirin bihi

wa lā tashtarū bi-°āyātī ṭhamanan qalilāñw-wa °iyyāya fa°ittaqūn

Believe in what I have sent down, confirming what is with you.

Do not be the first to reject it

and do not sell My Signs for a paltry price. Be aware of Me alone.

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah 2:41)

Along with this warning, He also shows the ways of cleansing and purification:

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ
• وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ •
فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونَ

kamāā °arsalnā fikum rasūlam-miñkum yatlū °alaykum °āyātīnā

wa yuzakkikum wa yu°allimukumu-l-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmata wa

yu°allimukum mā lam takūnū ta°lamūn :

fa-dḥkurūnū °adhkurukum wa °ushkurū-lī wa lā takfurūn

As We have sent a messenger to you from amongst yourselves

to recite Our Revelations to you, and purify you,

and teach you the Scripture and the Wisdom,

and teach you what you did not know.

Remember Me – I remember you.

Thank Me – and do not be ungrateful.

(Sūratu-l-Baqarah, 2:151)

Allāh ﷻ grants assistance and favor to the Muslims who undertake spiritual struggle or warfare. The following ʾāyāt confirms this:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

wa-l-ladhīna jāhadū fīnā la-nahdiyannahum subulanā;
wa ʾinna-llāha lamaʿa-l-muḥsinīn

As for those who strive in Our cause,

We will guide them to Our paths.

For Allāh is with the doers of goodness.

(Sūratu-l-ʾAnkabūt 29:69)

This is the struggle (*jihād*/جهاد) for liberation in its internal spiritual context, and ultimately it is the foundation and the head start for self liberation according to the teachings of ʾIslām. Without it, all norms of freedom would become falsehood and deception, and we would end in captivity and chains. We see, in the light of this Qurʾānic guidance, that the method Allāh ﷻ uses to cultivate humanity and to deliver us from the yoke of desires and the slavery of fleeting pleasures is the method of Singularity (*tawḥīd*/توحيد) which asserts the existence of a single and absolute truth that transcends the multiplicity of things in favor of the indivisibility of Allāh ﷻ which ultimately leads to the concept of a just, moral and coherent universe, as opposed to a universe of existential and moral chaos.

The doctrine of Tawḥīd (توحيد) means that the entire cosmos is a unified harmonious whole, centered around Allāh ﷻ, the Mercy Full, the Uniquely Compassionate, the Omnipotent and Omnipresent.

The teachings of Allāh ﷻ liberate us from worldly slavery and its vanishing pleasures and connect us to the green gardens through which rivers flow, the similitude of which is the Pleasure of Allah ﷻ.

Tawḥīd in ʾIslām is the aid *par excellence* for our inner liberation from all forms of slavery, and it is the aid for our emancipation and freedom in all fields and in every dimension.

This internal emancipation, or inner-building of the human being, is the cornerstone in the establishment of a free and happy society. As long as we do not have control over our selves (*nafs*) or are unable to control our inner situation or maintain our cultivated humanity in determining our conduct, we can never truly free our selves socially in order to resist temptation, nor wage the battle of an external liberation with merit and bravery.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

°inna-llaha lā yughayyiru mā bi-qawmin
ḥatta yughayyirū mā bi-añfusiḥim

Truly Allāh will never change the condition of a people
until they change what is in their selves.

(Sūratu-r-Ra°d, 13:11)

In order to understand this dimension of internal freedom we must understand more about what is meant by the self or the nafs in consonance with what Allāh ﷻ has mentioned about this.

Allāh ﷻ in the Qur°ān informs us that there are three levels of the self or the *nafs*. We have already mentioned the commanding or appetitive self (*nafsa-l-°ammara bi-sū°u* / نَفْسٌ لَّامَرَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ) which Allāh ﷻ mentions in the story of the Prophet Yūsuf عليه السلام:

وَمَا أُبْرِيْ نَفْسِيْ ؕ اِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَآ مَرَّءٌ بِالسُّوءِ اِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّيْ ؕ

اِنَّ رَبِّيْ غَفُوْرٌ رَّحِيْمٌ

wa māā °ubarri°u nafsi;

°inna-n-nafsa la-°ammāratun bi-s-sū°i

°illā mā raḥima rabbī; °inna rabbī ḡhafūrun raḥīm

I do not say my self was free from blame.

— the self indeed commands to evil acts —

except for those my Lord has mercy on.

My Lord is All-Forgiving, Uniquely Merciful.

(Sūrah Yūsuf 12:53)

In truth this is the level at which most humans exist. Our *nafsa-l-°ammara bi-sū°u* – the commanding or appetitive self – consists of a conglomeration of wants, desires, impulses, habits, fears, angers, appetites, tendencies and an ego that constructs a self image that it then seeks to protect and maintain any way it can – even by distorting the true nature of the realities around it. This is the commanding soul – but it is not one which commands but rather it is a self which *is* commanded by this host of impulses and desires.

It wanders distracted or seeks out satisfaction of its wants and justifies its behavior to itself so that it can continue doing what it does and wants to do and tends to trap itself in safe self protective, self justifying, or habitual or addictive behaviours.

At this stage the inner world of a human being is like a kingdom in chaos where the citizens are habits, desires, fears, moods, impulses, and egoism that all are clamoring for attention and satisfaction and the self is in reality an abject slave to them pulled this way and that in response to their many and varied demands and desires.

The way out and beyond this commanding appetitive self rests in developing what is called the blaming self (*nafs lawwāmah* / النَّفْسُ اللَّوَّامَةُ), which we may also think of in modern terms as the *conscience*.

لَا أَقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ

lā ʾuqāsimu bi-l-n-nafsi-l-lawwāmah
No! I swear by the self-reproaching self.
(Sūrah Qiyāma 75:2)

This is the level at which an inner struggle (*jihād*) begins to actively take place within our self – we gradually become aware of a higher, deeper reality and struggle to center our consciousness so that it does not move erratically from impulse to impulse, desire to desire, but so that all action and thought is fed through an aware, conscious center that struggles to manage and control the self of one's being.

Allāh ﷻ has thereby made guidance dependent on *jihād*. Therefore, the most perfect of people are those who struggle the most for His sake, and the most obligatory of *jihāds* (*ʾafradu-l-jihād*) is the *jihād* against the ego, the *jihād* against desires, the *jihād* against the *shayṭān*, and the *jihād* against the lower world (*jihādu-l-nafs wa jihādi-l-hawa wa jihādu-sh-shayṭān wa jihādu-d-dunyā*). Whoever struggles against these four, Allāh ﷻ will guide the person to the ways of His good pleasure which lead to His Paradise. Whoever leaves *jihād*, leaves guidance in proportion to his leaving *jihād*.

This is the stage of the active *jihād* – the greater struggle (*jihādu-l-ʾakbār* / جهاد الأكبر) by which the lower self is subdued and the higher potentials within a person are opened up. It manifests itself in both inner and outer forms of striving and struggle.

It is a process whereby we struggle to turn our inner self and our worldly life towards a new form of living – one that is immersed in a larger, truer vision of the nature of Reality – a Reality of which the physical worldly material reality is only a small portion.

Here we begin to realize the profundity of the covenant that was made with Allāh ﷻ before our existence on this earth – and here we struggle in an attempt to make our self true to this covenant.

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ
وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۖ شَهِدْنَا
أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

wa-idh ʾakḥadḥa rabbuka mim-banī ʾādama
min ḍḥuhūrihim ḍhurriyyatahum wa ashḥadahum ʿalāā ʾanfusihim
ʾalastu bi-rabbikum ; qalū balā shahidānā ;
ʾan taqūlū yawma-l-qiyāmati ʾinna kunnā ʿan ḥadhā ḡhāfilīn

When your Lord took out all their descendants from the loins of the children of Adam and made them testify against themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ they said, ‘We testify that indeed You are!’ Lest you say on the Day of Rising, ‘We knew nothing of this.’

(Sūratu-l-ʿArāf 7:172)

This ʾāyat contains the covenant (*ahd/عهد*) in which Allāh ﷻ summons before Himself in a place outside of time as we know it – otherwise known as pre-eternity – all the souls of the children of ʾĀdam عليه السلام who will ever be born in the form of sub-atomic particles (*ḍḥur/ذرة*) and asks these particles or souls, “Am I not your Lord” – and we all answered “Clearly! We see (*shahidānā*) or witness this is so.” After the acknowledgement of this covenant, all of us are then born into this world at our destined time and place – one by one.

We must understand in view of the final judgement that *all* souls that were, are or will be *saw* Allāh ﷻ and answered affirmatively!

The implication of this is that everyone who is born into this world has agreed in substance and in the very essence of our souls to this covenant, and that, although we may claim to have no conscious knowledge or memory of this pact, its reality is woven into our very nature. This world (*dunyā*) is a place of distraction and forgetfulness (*ghaflah*) but at our core lies the metaphysical truth of this covenant and one of the purposes of religion is to awaken to consciousness an awareness of this bond between Allāh ﷻ and us as well as all the concealed potentials that flow from this bond.

حرية — Freedom

All of the Prophets ﷺ have come throughout the entirety of time to remind us people of our promise of fidelity to this pact (*ahd/عهد*). The Qur'ān also often refers to itself as “a reminder”, as a call towards *taqwa*, towards an awakened and an aware consciousness.

This is the level of the soul at peace or the tranquil self (*nafsu-l-muṭmaʿinah/النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ*) referred to in the following ʿāyat:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ • اْزْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي • وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي

yāā ʿayuhā-n-nafsu-l-muṭmaʿinah •
ʾirjiʿī ilā rabbika rāḍiyatam-marḍiyyah •
fadā khulī fī ʿibādī • wa-ʿdā-khulī jannatī •

Oh you whose self (*naḥs*) is at peace
return to your Lord pleased and well pleasing.
Enter with My worshippers – enter My Garden!

(Sūrah al-Fajr 89: 28-30)

This is the highest state of spiritual development. A satisfied soul is in a state of bliss, contentment and at peace with Allāh ﷻ and its self. The soul is at peace because it knows that in spite of its failures in this world, it has been and will return to Allāh ﷻ. Purified of tension, it emerges triumphant from the struggle and resides in peace and bliss. At this level the human being witnesses the signs from Allāh ﷻ on the horizons and within their own selves (*naḥs*)

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْآفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ

حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ ۚ

أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِ بِرَبِّكَ أَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

sanurihim ʿāyātinā fī-l-āfāqi wa fī ʾanfusihiḥ
ḥattā yatabayyana lahum ʾannahu-l-ḥaqqā;

ʾawa lam yakfi bi-rabbika ʾannahu ʿalā kullī shayʾin shahīdā

We will show them Our Signs on the horizon and within themselves
until it is clear to them that it is the truth.

Is it not enough for your Lord that He is a witness of everything?

(Sūratu-l-Fussilat 41:53)

حرية — Freedom

In this way our own self (*nafs*) becomes a place where the signs of Allāh ﷻ are revealed and made manifest.

When the self rests in an abode of peace, then, in the quiet of this abode, it becomes possible to witness this manifestation. It is said that Allāh ﷻ manifests in the silences of the soul – so one who is always distracted and busy with the internal noise of desires, passions, distractions, egotism etc. will never be truly conscious of Allāh ﷻ. In order to listen, in order to hear, one has to be silent. If a person never stops talking, they will never be able to properly listen to another – they will be distracted with their own outpourings, their own opinions, their own ego. They will never reach a point of internal quietude of peace, and thus that which is subtle will never be experienced. In the Qurʾān, Allāh ﷻ mentions that He ﷻ is “The Subtle, the Aware.”

أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

ʾalā yaʿlamu man khalaqa wa huwa-l-laṭīfu-l-khabīr

Should He not know what He created?

And He is the Subtle, the Aware

(Sūratu-l-Mulk 67:14)

One has to cease talking, and cultivate an alert but calm attentiveness in order to see deeper than the surface. Just as the depths of a pond become invisible when the surface water is in disturbance and motion, our own depths become invisible when we are in constant agitation and movement. The people of this level know the great Reality behind the world and the endless distractions of this life are seen in their proper perspective – they no longer dominate but yet they are given their proper due.

Each of these levels of the *nafs* represents a phase change within our beings on the path to true and lasting freedom. Each level incorporates a wide range within itself and the spiritual practices, the ritual requirements, the contemplative aspects, the ethical imperatives, the metaphysical teachings of the religion (*dīn*) are designed to transform the inner substance until the inner structure of the *nafs* becomes the mediator, the meeting point, between the spirit (*ruh* /روح) and the body (*jism*/جسم) — “the junction of the two seas”

مَجْمَعُ الْبَحْرَيْنِ

majmaʿa-l-baḥrayn

The nafs becomes the mediator, the meeting point, between the spirit and the body. The nafs, as such, is characterized by opposing characteristics. It is both luminous and dark, high and low. It is a mixture of the two sides. It possesses the attributes present in the Spirit in a watered down manner. Mullā Ṣadrā (ملا صدرا) refers to the soul by the Qurʾānic phrase which we have mentioned above “...it is the junction of the two seas...” (*majāmaʿa-l-baḥrayn*) (18:60) The sea of the spirit and the sea of the material world. Allāh ﷻ says:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ هَذَا عَذْبٌ فُرَاتٌ وَهَذَا مِلْحٌ أُجَاجٌ
وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخًا وَحِجْرًا مَحْجُورًا

wa huwa-l-ladhī maraja-l-baḥrayni
hadḥā ʿadhḥun furātuñw-wa hadḥā milḥun ʿujājuñw-
wa jaʿala baynahumā barzakḥañw-waḥijjāran mahjūrā

It is He who has unloosed both seas
– the one sweet and refreshing, the other salty and bitter –
and put an isthmus between them – an uncrossable barrier.
(Sūratu-l-Furqān 25:53)

and

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ مِنَ الْمَاءِ بَشَرًا

wa huwa-l-ladhī kḥalaqa mina-l-māʾi basharā
And it is He who created the human from water.
(Sūratu-l-Furqān 25:54)

The material world is the visible world or the manifest world (the world of the salt sea that burns). The non-manifest world is the unseen world, the world of the Spirit (the sweet sea that quenches thirst). Our self (*nafs*) is a microcosm containing characteristics of both these worlds, created from the “water” of both of these worlds.

From this perspective the self (*nafs*) is a barzakḥ (برزخ), a meeting place, a point of overlap, of intersection, where the world of matter and the world of spirit connect. Since the *nafs* contains both; we should strive mightily to strengthen its numinous or spiritual aspect. But it is only when the self reaches to the realm of the blaming self (*nafs lawwāmah* /النَّفْسُ اللَّوَّامَةُ) or the conscience that this option becomes apparent, as the blaming self is itself a kind of barzakḥ

Indeed though the sweet sea actually finally comes into actual view from the realm of the blaming self, it is only when one attains to the state of the self at peace (*nafsu-l-muṭma'inah* / النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ) and hears the invitation to enter the Garden that one gains access to the world of the Spirit and sips from the sweet sea that quenches all thirst.

There is a well-known saying in Arabic which goes,

مَنْ ذَاقَ عَرَفَ، وَمَنْ لَمْ يَذُقْ لَمْ يَعْرِفْ

man dhāwq ʿaraf – wa man lam yadhuq lam yaʿrif

Who tastes knows – Who doesn't taste doesn't know.

The story behind the saying, which I believe may be apocryphal, is that the Prophet ﷺ was in the company of some of his ʿaṣḥāb and showed them a jar which came from Benha in Egypt which was famous for its honey (and all such jars always contain honey from Benha). Holding it up he asked them ﷺ: “What is in this jar?” and they all replied “Honey” except for ʿAlī رضي الله عنه, who said, “I don't know. Let me taste it,” and he then went and put his finger in the pot and, removing it, licked it and said, “Honey”. Whereupon the Prophet ﷺ said, “Who tastes knows. who doesn't taste doesn't know.” So though one may “see” the sea of sweetness, unless one tastes the sweetness of that sea one really doesn't know. For this reason the scholars have defined knowledge into three categories in view of the well known saying, “The Truth shall set you free”.

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ

kallā law taʿlamūna ʿilma-l-yaqīn

Nay, only if you could have certain knowledge.

(Sūrat-t-Takāthūr 102:5)

ʿIlma-l-Yaqīn – The first step comes when one hears about this Knowledge and comes to know that there is a possibility of certainty. This usually comes about when one begins to seek out this knowledge, and then studies about it which leads one to the realization that somewhere there must be teachers of this science and then one seeks them out. According to the people of taṣawwuf, ʿilma-l-yaqīn means to infer the agent of the work by seeing the work, as when the ʿaṣḥāb رضي الله عنهم saw the jar from Benha and *knew* by inference that such a jar must contain honey since all such jars contain honey.

However they didn't really know that there was honey in the jar. But there is a hidden door which leads to a path that is both inductive, and intuitive (*hadsī*) as well as automatic and spontaneous and both obvious and clear (*badihi*). This is the path of *kashf* in which one infers the truth but still does not yet really know the truth.

ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ

ṭhumma latarawūnnahā °ayna-l-yaqīn

Then you will see it with the eye of certainty.

(Sūrat-t-Takāthur 102:7)

In the story °Ali عليه السلام wants to actually know what is in the pot from Benha and asks the Prophet ﷺ if he can taste it and upon tasting it he tells the °aṣṣḥāb رضي الله عنهم that it is indeed honey.

Hearing that it is honey and knowing that °Ali عليه السلام is truthful they all know that the pot really does contain honey, but they still don't really know because they themselves have not tasted but are relying on someone else to tell them what the truth is. They have "seen" it but they have not really and truly "tasted" it.

This is °ayna-l-yaqīn or seeing the Truth, the Reality and coming into the presence of the Truth and accepting the guidance of the people of this knowledge, but one is still a step away from the Truth.

Only the one who is prepared to take the step of sticking his finger in the honey pot and tasting it will really know the truth for certain.

إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ حَقُّ الْيَقِينِ

°inna hadḥa lahuwa ḥaqqu-l-yaqīn

Truly this is absolutely certain truth.

(Sūrat-l-Waqi'ah 56:95)



Ḥaqqu-l-yaqīn is the certification of the Truth and becoming the reality and a carrier of this Truth.

As my friend °Ali Anṣari writes, "As Muslims, we are required to teach what we know. And, as Muslims, our first knowledge is of the Unity of Allāh ﷻ and the finality of the Prophecy of Muhammad ﷺ. But it behooves us to know the level of our knowledge."

Our ability to teach or transmit is dependent upon the level at which we have actually internalized our knowledge (our students will only “get it” to the level that we get it – and maybe even more, but we won’t get that), so this knowledge is also knowledge of the method of internalization, the embodiment or realization process (hence self-realization).

Ascertainment of the ‘level’ of knowledge or embodiment is dependent upon, equivalent to and can be gauged by, an embodied knowledge of the three stages of the process. It applies also to belief. Do we hear and speak of belief, do we witness belief or do we actually embody belief? Genuine transmission is a body to body experience. Total embodiment implies total acceptance. We only thoroughly believe what we have thoroughly accepted, and acceptance itself is subject to the three stages [we have mentioned above]. We can think about it, we can think we got it, and we can really have it. The one who has “it” and embodies “it” is known as *waliyullāh* or the one who is befriended by Allāh ﷻ.

And now, at long last, we have arrived at what freedom is really all about and why I have written this paper and given this talk.

Until you reach actual realisation and “taste the honey” and drink from the “sweet sea” you are never really and truly free, but only partially free in accord with how exactly far you have progressed in this path that we have tried to clarify, stretching from the blaming self to the accusing self to the self at peace through the level of thinking about freedom, knowing freedom exists and being free.

But the one who is free should always know that there is going to be price that must be paid for this freedom, because the one who is free is estatic, which means, “elated, euphoric, delighted, rapturous, joyful, thrilled, exultant.” and this is the one thing the slave masters can’t stand. The free man or free woman must always know that all the forces of the state, all the forces of organised religion, all the forces of authority will always in the end conspire to destroy them.

As Ronald Reagan said, “Know this! If some among you fear taking a stand because you are afraid of reprisals from customers, clients, or even the government, recognize that you are just feeding the crocodile hoping he’ll eat you last.”

The only basis of charismatic or spiritual authority is the acceptance of the claims of the self-realized teacher by his followers or students. Upon the death of the charismatic self-realised spiritualised being, this type of authority can easily degenerate into traditional authority in which power is often exercised by those who had surrounded the charismatic leader. Traditional authority takes over and bases its power on custom and on the holiness of tradition.

We have seen this in ʿIslām with the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ which is recorded in oral traditions (*ḥadīth*) based on his words, his actions, his acceptance of the words or actions of others, and his personal characteristics or attributes (*sifāt/سمات*).

But this is only a first step, since rules and laws are needed in order for tradition to be preserved; and this is where legal-rational authority begins.

Legal-rational authority is the belief in the legality of standard rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands regardless of their level of spiritual attainment, awareness and understanding. Those who are subordinate to the system accept such authority thus building the bases for legitimacy.

Every religion has substance and form; the substance refers to the spirit: contact with or experience of it is determined by the processes we have already described regarding the nafs and the various forms of existential spiritual knowledge (*ʿilm*) through which one becomes an *ʿarif bi-llāh* or a “knower by Allāh” or a *waliullāh*, which is a friend of Allāh, which is not the same as an *ʿalim* or a scholar though some, but not all, of the *ʿulemāʾ* are also *ʿarifīn*.

Form, on the other hand, is determined by the Law, which in turn is based on canonical tenets. Form tends to bureaucratize faith, constraining and limiting the believers and, in the case of despotism, even reaching the point of sanctioning the killings of those who do not accept the Law as in the cases of al-Hallaj ؑ or Suhrawardi ؑ.

These are typical examples of extremism and here one can think of the various neo-kharjites, salafis, deobandis, wahhabis etc. who may be found everywhere throughout and within the Muslim community. The way of thinking and type of behavior manifested by such people tends to stifle the spiritual message that is the actual base of religion, making form, in the end, more important than content.

This of course constitutes a paradox since, as we know, all the Prophets and Messengers ﷺ of Allāh ﷻ, and we do not discriminate between them, were mystics who experienced the divine and created, based on these spiritual experiences, foundational changes to the spiritual, cultural and social milieu in which they lived.

When I mentioned earlier on that the one who is free or had been freed or has tasted the honey and drunk from the sea of sweetness should always know that there is going to be price that must be paid for this freedom, I was referring to this paradox.

Of course we have been blessed in the realm of Sunni °Islām by the teachings of al-Ghazali رحمه الله (among others), who was able to rationalize and rectify, to a great extent, the worlds of the spirit and the form through his teachings especially in the °Iḥyā' °Ulūmu-d-Dīn (إحياء علوم الدين) which allowed many mystics, or perhaps, better, showed many mystics, how to live within the realm of the Law and avoid the dangers of the ecstatic life coming into conflict with the world of religious authorities.

Within Shī'ah °Islām the doctrine of *taqiyyah* (تقية) allows adherents to conceal their faith when they are under threat, persecution, or compulsion and also *kitmān* (secrecy or concealment/كتمان), which is the act of paying lip service to authority (oddly enough used against the Soviets during their occupation of Central Asia) as a sort of political or religious camouflage, for the purpose of survival, in circumstances where open opposition would result in persecution or if one feels under threat by, for instance, extremists or those who are hostile to one's faith, beliefs or actions. A case for this can be found in the following excerpt from a verse in Sūrah °Āl °Imrān:

أَنْ تَتَّقُوا مِنْهُمْ تُقَاةً

...°an tattaqū miñ hum tuqātan...

unless it be to protect yourselves against them
(Sūrah °Āl °Imrān 3:28)

Abu Bakr ar-Razi, in his book, °Aḥkām al-Qur'ān, v2, p10, has explained the above excerpt from verse 3:28 "...except by way of precaution (*tattaqū*), that you may protect yourselves (*tuqātan*) from them" by affirming that *taqiyyah* or *kitmān* may be used when one is afraid for life or limb.

As Carl W. Ernst in his book, *Sufi martyrs of love: the Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* writes, “The empowered saint [*wali*], capable of performing *karamat* must yet be careful to suppress [his abilities] on most occasions. Prone to ecstasy, whether in silent solitude or abetted by music or poetry while in the company of other Ṣūfis, the balanced saint [*wali*] must yet be able to recall and perform his obligatory duties as a Muslim. Avoiding the company of worldly people, merchants, soldiers and government officials, including rulers, the mature saint must yet live in proximity to them (i.e., near a city) and stay in touch with worldly people through his students. Clearly the task of being a ṣhaykh, involves, in Digby’s words, ‘striving after different excellencies’”.

The tension between the ecstatic mystics and the ʾIslāmic orthodoxy in different historical contexts and different places has engaged the ṣūfis in different ways; indeed many famous ṣūfis were initially trained as legal scholars (‘*ulamā*’) but at some point in their lives they gradually repudiated that office and turned to Ṣūfi spirituality with its emphasis on ḥaqīqat (حقیقت) or the inner truth, as opposed to the šharīʿat, or the law that governs social roles and obligations.

Ṣūfis have adopted various stances towards šharīʿat – sometimes being openly critical of it and sometimes affirming that it is absolutely necessary for the smooth functioning of everyday affairs in a Muslim’s life. However, the law, the academic learning, and the intellect needed to grasp the law, is compared by ṣūfis to the hard outer shell of a nut. The shell is necessary for the nut to exist as a nut, but it is not the germ of life that makes the nut viable as a seed. That oil or germ is the ḥaqīqat, or the animating truth within; and this ḥaqīqah can only be grasped by the heart, the organ of love.

The tension between the spirit and law, between ecstasy and sobriety, has never entirely disappeared. The justification of ṣūfism in regard to šharīʿah depended on a frank division of labor: it was generally, if only tacitly, agreed in ʾIslāmic cultures that the ṣūfis dealt with the inner side of the faith whilst the scholars (‘*ulemā*’) were concerned with the outer side. Both were recognized as being necessary – at least in theory. But in practice this division of labor caused much wrangling and in the present time ṣūfism is routinely excoriated and ṣūfis are considered little better than *rāfiḍī* dogs.

All of this is part and parcel of the need on the part of authorities, be they religious, political or secular, to be sure the genie never gets out of the bottle or only appears to momentarily get out of the bottle in accord with socially consensual and highly regulated guide lines.

Those who have tasted the honey and drunk the waters of the sea of sweetness are a threat at every level to every form of authority because they cannot be controlled – they are free- they are *ex static*.

And this, in the end, is what cannot be permitted except by way of metaphor or slide of hand or legerdemain or just plain fooling them.

Yes you are free to think as you like, you are free to worship as you like, you are free to move about, you are free to own property, you are free to get an education, you are free to take part in choosing your leaders but only within certain boundaries.

You might equally say you are free to drink, you are free to take drugs, you are free to have sex with whom you like as you like, you are free to have affairs, you are even free to murder, rape and bring about mayhem but, again, only within certain boundaries.

But what you are not free to do is to challenge the status quo, be it political or religious except, again, in a kind of metaphorical way.

As Bob Dylan famously observed, You don't really know what is going on, do you Mr. Jones? What happened to the black suitcase in the middle of the dark staircase? Why's he's hiding and acting like nothing is wrong? Where'd he go? And Mr. Jones is suddenly gone.

Beware! For the means, be they political, altruistic, religious or even spiritual always become, for the shallow, the end, and the vehicle becomes the idol. Only the person possessed of wisdom, not the one of faith or goodwill or intellect, can cause the vehicle to move again.

Take a good look and what's going on. Take a good look at what is going down.

Oppression and servitude deprive a human being of all freedoms and are prisons in which terror and tyranny devour the self image, will and desire of people to grow spiritually. Oppression and servitude deprive people of all sense of a higher purpose and rob them of their free will and destroy all that is good and pure in our true nature (*fitrah*). Remember – and the truth shall set you free!

As al-Husayn ؑ said, “It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees.” and we must never forget that every day is °Ashura and every place is Karbalā°.

Ask yourself why there is such great fear of °Islām remembering that submission (°istislām/استسلام) to the will of Allāh ﷻ grants human beings the means to choose a better way of life and to live their lives in harmony with the laws of the universe (fiṭra/فطرة) even if the Muslims themselves no longer know it.

The Prophet ﷺ said: “There will come a time for my people when there will remain nothing of the Qur°ān except its outward form and nothing of °Islām except its name and they will call themselves by this name even though they are the people furthest from it. The masājid will be full of people but they will be empty of right guidance. The religious leaders (fuqahā°/فقهاء) of that day will be the most evil religious leaders under the heavens; sedition and dissension (fitnah) will go out from them and return to them.” ibn Babuya, “°Islām began as something strange, and it shall return as something strange, so give good news to the strangers.” He was asked, “Who are those strangers, Oh Messenger of Allāh?” He replied, “Those that correct the Sunnah when the people become corrupt.” Muslim

The Strangers (ghurabā°/الغريباء) are the Muslims who love one another solely for Allāh ﷻ and who love the Dīn more than they love their race or tribe, national origin, or any other superficial bond. The Strangers however, are not just ordinary Muslims who only say they believe; who wear °Islāmic attire; have °Islāmic sounding names, or who just call themselves Muslims. No, the Ghurabā° are the holy free *ex static* Muslims who have tasted the honey and are drunk on the sea of sweetness who will revive the real sunnah and this *dinu-l-ḥaqq* based on what Allāh has ﷻ said to His Beloved ﷺ,

مَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

mā °arsalnākā °illa-rahmatal-li-l-°ālamīn

We have not sent you except as a Mercy for all the worlds.

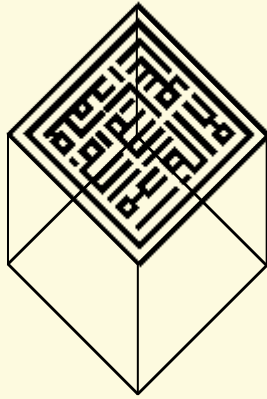
(Sūratu-l-°Ambiyā° 21:107)

wa-llāhu °alim

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